

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Concerned that many households in Ohio's Sixth Congressional District may lose access to television, Congressman Charlie Wilson (OH-6) is directly appealing to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration for help.

Last week, Rep. Charlie Wilson (OH-6) voted with the majority in the House of Representatives to pass legislation delaying the deadline for transition to digital television from February 17th to June 12th. The major impetus for this delay was to allow additional time for the 2.2 million Americans to get coupons for digital television converter boxes. As many as 4,000 households in Ohio's Sixth Congressional District are on that waiting list.

Yesterday, however, the FCC announced that many broadcasters throughout the country still plan to drop their analog signals on February 17th as originally planned. If these stations go forward with their digital transition next week there will be a significant number of households that rely on Over-the-Air (OTA) broadcasting that will lose their television signal next Tuesday. For example, all of the stations in both the Huntington-Charleston and the Wheeling-Steubenville television markets plan to turn off their analog signals. These markets cover more than half of the 12 counties that make up Wilson's district.

"This could leave families without a vital communication source just as we're recovering from terrible ice storms and heading into severe spring weather season," Wilson said. "I'm worried about this."

Several other Members of Congress joined Wilson in asking Deputy Assistant Secretary Anna Gomez at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to prioritize the wait-list to get coupons to OTA households.

His letter to Ms. Gomez follows.

February 11, 2009

Ms. Anna Gomez
Deputy Assistant Secretary
United States Department of Commerce
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Ms. Gomez,

We write today to urge you to prioritize the wait-list for digital converter box coupons to reflect the dire situation soon to face Over-the-Air (OTA) households.

As you well know, there are over two million households currently on the waiting list and almost half of those already subscribe to cable or satellite service. While we believe that all households who have applied for a DTV converter box coupon should remain eligible for such, we are asking the NTIA to prioritize the wait-list to get coupons to OTA households first. We strongly believe it is in the public interest to make sure that those that have no other option for television service be the first to receive the coupons.

Yesterday, the FCC announced that 491 out of approximately 1800 broadcasters from across the country have applied for a waiver to drop their analog signals on Feb 17th as originally planned. This is in addition to the nearly 200 broadcasters that have already dropped their analog signal. If all of those stations go forward with their digital transition next week, there will be a significant number of Over the Air (OTA) households that will lose their television signal next Tuesday.

We understand the funding situation with the DTV converter box coupons is restricted and know that you are doing everything in your power to accommodate all requests as quickly as possible.

We applaud your efforts on managing an enormous task and are reluctant to add to your burden, but we truly believe this looming deadline warrants immediate action.

We respectfully ask you to consider our request to prioritize the waiting list so that OTA households will be the first to receive coupons from this point forward.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

CHARLIE WILSON
Member of Congress